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AUTHOR Spillane, Robert R.
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ABSTRACT

This paper presents an approach to merit pay that can spur achievement of three important goals: (1) rewarding outstanding teachers with both salary and prestige; (2) strengthening the teaching profession by cultivating leadership from within and encouraging collegial support; and (3)making it professionally and financially advantageous for the best teachers to remain in the classroom enhancing the quality of education. This kind of successful approach depends on viewing merit pay in the proper perspective: (1) teacher professionalism can be enhanced if the best teachers guide teacher candidates into the profession; (2) to attract highly qualified people, teaching must offer competitive salaries and promotional opportunities that do not take teachers out of the classroom; and (3) teacher evaluation must be made effective and should be research-based. Without such improvements in the profession, myths about the difficulties of differentiating appropriately among teachers will continue to dominate thinking about merit pay and will restrict possibilities for using merit pay fairly and effectively. (PGD)

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VIEWPOINT SESSION - MERIT PAY: IS IT THE WAY?

AASA FEBRUARY 1987

ROBERT R. SPILLANE
FAIRFAX County Public Schools
(Virginia)

THERE ARE TWO BASIC QUESTIONS THAT MUST BE ASKED ABOUT TODAY'S DISCUSSION TOPIC:

1. THE FIRST QUESTION IS: WHAT DO WE MEAN BY "MERIT PAY"? THE TERM, AS YOU KNOW, IS APPLIED TO PRACTICALLY EVERY EFFORT OF THE PAST FIFTY YEARS TO DIFFERENTIATE TEACHER SALARIES. EVEN TODAY, IT REFERS TO EVERYTHING FROM A SIMPLE ANNUAL BONUS TO COMPLEX EVALUATION SYSTEMS. WHO GETS IT AND HOW THEY GET IT MAKES A BIG DIFFERENCE IN THE ANSWER TO THE QUESTION: "MERIT PAY: IS IT THE WAY?"

2. THE SECOND QUESTION IS THIS: IS IT THE WAY TO WHAT? WHAT IS IT THAT WE HOPE TO ACHIEVE BY OFFERING SOME TYPE OF MERIT PAY? IF MERIT PAY IS SIMPLY A MEAGER REWARD FOR MANY--OR A SUBSTANTIAL REWARD FOR A SELECT FEW--IT IS UNLIKELY TO SOLVE THE TEACHER SHORTAGE PROBLEM. IF IT IS THE "FROSTING ON THE CAKE" AND THE CAKE IS A LOW BASE SALARY, IT WILL FAIL TO ATTRACT AND RETAIN "THE BEST AND THE BRIGHTEST."

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LET ME BEGIN BY GIVING YOU MY ANSWERS TO THE QUESTIONS RAISED BY TODAY'S TOPIC--IN REVERSE ORDER BECAUSE THE SECOND PART IS EASIER TO ANSWER. IF MERIT PAY IS ANYTHING LESS THAN THE WAY TO QUALITY EDUCATION AND INCREASED TEACHER PROFESSIONALISM, THEN IT ISN'T WORTH TALKING ABOUT; JUST RAISE TEACHER SALARIES AND FORGET ABOUT IT. THE BOTTOM LINE IS NOT THE REWARD SYSTEM ITSELF . . . IT IS HOW THAT REWARD SYSTEM IMPROVES CLASSROOM INSTRUCTION.

IS MERIT PAY THE WAY TO REACH THAT GOAL? I BELIEVE IT IS--BUT ONLY IF THE PAY PLAN IS WEDDED TO A SOUND TEACHER EVALUATION SYSTEM, AND THE GOAL IS TO REWARD BETTER TEACHING . . . AND ONLY IF MERIT PAY IS VIEWED WITHIN THE TOTAL CONTEXT OF THE TEACHING PROFESSION AND EDUCATION REFORM. IT IS NOT A PANACEA; IT IS ONLY ONE PIECE OF THE INTRICATE PUZZLE OF TEACHER PROFESSIONALISM.

A MERIT PAY PLAN CAN WORK IF IT IS CAREFULLY DEVELOPED AND AVOIDS THE WELL-KNOWN PITFALLS OF THE UNSUCCESSFUL PLANS WHICH LITTER THE LANDSCAPE. THE FAMILIAR ARGUMENTS AGAINST MERIT PAY ARE SURMOUNTABLE. IN FACT, THOSE ARGUMENTS ARE RELATIVELY FEW AND HIGHLY PREDICTABLE; THEY ARE THE SAME ARGUMENTS THAT HAVE BEEN MADE FOR SO MANY DECADES THAT THEY HAVE BECOME PROFESSIONAL MYTHS.

PROFESSIONAL MYTH #1: A TEACHER IS A TEACHER IS A TEACHER. THERE ARE NO DISTINGUISHABLE DIFFERENCES AMONG TEACHERS. ALL TEACHERS ARE BASICALLY ALIKE AND, THEREFORE, SHOULD BE TREATED ALIKE--SAME EVALUATION, SAME SALARY, SAME STAGNANT CAREER. THIS INDEFENSIBLE LOGIC REDUCES TEACHING TO THE LEAST COMMON DENOMINATOR AND ASSUMES THAT IMPOSING A UNIFORM CURRICULUM ASSURES UNIFORM TEACHING.

IT PLACES ON TEXTBOOK PUBLISHERS THE RESPONSIBILITY TO PRODUCE "TEACHER-PROOF" TEXTBOOKS WITH EXCESSIVELY COMPLEX, DETAILED, COOKBOOK DIRECTIONS FOR PRESENTING INSTRUCTIONAL MATERIAL. THE VERBATIM SCRIPTS IN SOME TEACHER EDITIONS ARE AN INSULT TO ANY INTELLIGENT TEACHER AND A SAD COMMENTARY ON OUR LACK OF CONFIDENCE IN CLASSROOM TEACHERS.

PROFESSIONAL MYTH #2: THERE ARE DIFFERENCES AMONG TEACHERS, BUT THEY CANNOT BE PUBLICLY ACKNOWLEDGED EVEN THOUGH EVERYONE (ESPECIALLY TEACHERS THEMSELVES) PRIVATELY RECOGNIZES THEM--BECAUSE THAT WOULD EXPLODE THE MYTH OF SAMENESS AND CAUSE DIVISIVENESS AMONG TEACHERS. THIS LOGIC LEADS US TO TODAY'S MOST COMMON (AND HYPOCRITICAL) APPROACH: PRETEND THEY ARE THE SAME AND TREAT THEM THAT WAY.

OR PROFESSIONAL MYTH #3: THERE ARE DIFFERENCES AMONG TEACHERS, BUT IT IS IMPOSSIBLE TO IDENTIFY THEM BECAUSE THE TEACHING ACT IS TOO OBSCURE, COMPLEX, MYSTERIOUS AND UNFATHOMABLE TO BE DESCRIBED. IT IS, THEREFORE, IMPOSSIBLE TO DISTINGUISH AND EVALUATE THE COMPONENTS OF QUALITY TEACHING. THIS LOGIC DISREGARDS THE SUBSTANTIAL RESEARCH FINDINGS OF THE DECADE, AND UNDERLIES THE COMMON FEAR THAT OBSERVATION FORMS WILL REDUCE TEACHING TO SHALLOW, SIMPLISTIC CHECKLISTS OF CLASSROOM BEHAVIORS.

ACTUALLY, HOWEVER, SOME GROUPS ATTEMPTING TO COMPENSATE FOR THIS FEAR HAVE FALLEN INTO THE OPPOSITE TRAP OF DEVELOPING VOLUMINOUS OBSERVATION FORMS THAT ARE FAR TOO COMPREHENSIVE TO BE FUNCTIONAL. THE FEAR OF EITHER EXTREME IS UNDERSTANDABLE . . . . WHAT IS NOT LOGICAL IS THE CONCLUSION THAT WE ARE INCAPABLE OF FINDING A REASONABLE MIDDLE GROUND.

PROFESSIONAL MYTH #4: A SLIGHT VARIATION OF THE SAME ARGUMENT IS THAT THE TEACHING ACT IS TOO OBSCURE, COMPLEX, MYSTERIOUS AND UNFATHOMABLE TO BE UNDERSTOOD BY ANYONE OTHER THAN TEACHERS. IT IS ESPECIALLY UNFATHOMABLE TO THOSE WHO EVALUATE TEACHERS, NAMELY PRINCIPALS. THIS LOGIC IGNORES THE FACT THAT PRINCIPALS ARE ALSO EDUCATORS WHO HAVE HAD CLASSROOM TEACHING EXPERIENCE--IN ADDITION TO TRAINING IN THE SUPERVISION OF INSTRUCTION. IF TODAY'S PRINCIPALS ARE BETTER BUILDING MANAGERS THAN INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERS, THE FAULT LIES MORE WITH ORGANIZATIONAL PRIORITIES THAN IT DOES WITH INHERENT ABILITIES. CHANGING PRINCIPALS' PRIORITIES

IS SIMPLY A MATTER OF CHANGING THE ORGANIZATION'S PRIORITIES AND EXPECTATIONS. IF WE WANT STRONG INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERS WHO ARE CREDIBLE EVALUATORS OF TEACHER PERFORMANCE, THEN WE MUST SELECT, TRAIN, AND EVALUATE PRINCIPALS ON THE BASIS OF THOSE CHARACTERISTICS.

IMPLICIT IN THIS ARGUMENT IS THE FALSE ASSUMPTION THAT TEACHERS, THEMSELVES, HAVE NO ROLE IN EVALUATING OTHER TEACHERS OR DETERMINING WHO GETS MERIT PAY. ADMINISTRATIVELY IMPOSED MERIT PAY PLANS, WHICH ARE SUSCEPTIBLE TO THE COMMON CRITICISM OF PATRONAGE, ARE EDUCATIONAL DINOSAURS. IN THIS DAY AND AGE, IT IS INCONCEIVABLE TO ME THAT ANY MERIT PAY PLAN WOULD BE PROPOSED WITHOUT THE ACTIVE INVOLVEMENT OF TEACHERS AT EVERY STAGE OF DEVELOPMENT--FROM DESIGN TO IMPLEMENTATION.

<u>PROFESSIONAL MYTH #5:</u> THE HIGHEST SALARIES SHOULD GO TO TEACHERS WHO HAVE THE MOST YEARS OF SERVICE AND THE MOST ACADEMIC CREDITS, REGARDLESS OF THEIR EFFECTIVENESS AS TEACHERS. THIS TAKES US FULL CIRCLE TO THE MYTH THAT THERE ARE NO QUALITATIVE DIFFERENCES AMONG TEACHERS AND, THEREFORE, MONETARY REWARD MUST BE BASED ON QUANTIFIABLE FACTORS THAT ARE TOTALLY EXTERNAL TO TEACHING ITSELF. THIS, OF COURSE, MEANS THAT MARGINAL AND INEFFECTIVE TEACHERS GET THE SAME REWARDS AS THE BEST TEACHERS.

I ACCEPT NONE OF THESE PROFESSIONAL MYTHS; I BELIEVE THAT:

1. THERE ARE QUALITATIVE DIFFERENCES AMONG TEACHERS.
2. THESE DIFFERENCES ARE RECOGNIZED BY MOST PEOPLE, INCLUDING TEACHERS THEMSELVES.
3. THE CHARACTERISTICS OF EFFECTIVE TEACHING CAN BE IDENTIFIED AND MEASURED.
4. PRINCIPALS CAN BE CREDIBLE INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERS AND RELIABLE EVALUATORS OF CLASSROOM TEACHING.
5. THE HIGHEST SALARIES SHOULD GO TO THE BEST TEACHERS; MARGINAL TEACHERS SHOULD RECEIVE ASSISTANCE, BUT NO RAISES; AND INEFFECTIVE TEACHERS SHOULD BE REMOVED.

THE CRUX OF THE MATTER IS, OBVIOUSLY, THE IDENTIFICATION OF "THE BEST." HOW IT IS DONE, BY WHOM IT IS DONE, AND WHEN IT IS DONE ARE THE PROCESS QUESTIONS TO BE ADDRESSED IN INDIVIDUAL SCHOOL SYSTEMS AS THEY CURRENTLY ARE BEING ADDRESSED IN EIGHT PILOT SCHOOLS IN FAIRFAX COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS. AS IMPORTANT AS THESE ANSWERS WILL BE TO NEXT YEAR'S IMPLEMENTATION IN ALL OF OUR SCHOOLS, THE "SUCCESS" OF THE PILOT DOES NOT DEPEND ON FINDING ONE RIGHT ANSWER . . . . THAT'S ANOTHER MYTH--THERE IS NO ONE, ABSOLUTE, RIGHT WAY TO DO ANYTHING. THE SPECIFIC PROCEDURES WE EVENTUALLY DECIDE UPON ARE LESS CRITICAL TO THE SUCCESS OF THE PERFORMANCE EVALUATION PAY PLAN THAN THE UNDERLYING CONVICTION THAT THE TEACHING PROFESSION MUST BE FREED FROM THE SHACKLES OF THE LAST CENTURY BEFORE WE ENTER THE NEXT CENTURY.

TO OVERCOME RESISTANCE TO MERIT PAY, WE MUST DISPEL BOTH THESE PROFESSIONAL MYTHS AND THE DEEPLY-ENTRENCHED SOCIETAL ATTITUDES ABOUT TEACHING WHICH ARE ROOTED IN THE BLUE-COLLAR, INDUSTRIAL MODEL OF THE PAST: LOW PAY, MINIMAL TRAINING OR PREPARATION FOR THE JOB, REPETITIVE WORK, LITTLE INTELLECTUAL CHALLENGE OR PROFESSIONAL GROWTH, NO DECISION-MAKING OR PROMOTIONAL OPPORTUNITIES, AND WORK BY A TIMECLOCK. TEACHERS WHO GRADUATED FROM "NORMAL SCHOOL" IN THE 1920'S AND TAUGHT ONLY THE LIMITED CONTENT OF A PRESCRIBED TEXTBOOK MAY HAVE FIT THIS MOLD--AND CONTRIBUTED TO THE MYTH THAT A TEACHER IS A TEACHER IS A TEACHER--BUT THAT IS NOT SOCIETY'S EXPECTATION OF TODAY'S TEACHERS.

WHY IS IT, THEN, THAT WE CLING TO VESTIGES OF THE INDUSTRIAL MODEL? THESE, FOR EXAMPLE, ARE STILL WITH US: LOW PAY, MINIMAL ACADEMIC PREPARATION, LACK OF DECISION-MAKING AND PROMOTIONAL OPPORTUNITIES, AND--IF NOT ACTUAL, AT LEAST SYMBOLIC--USE OF A TIMECLOCK. ELIMINATING THESE TRACES OF THE PAST MAY BE EASIER THAN ELIMINATING THE SOCIETAL ATTITUDE HUMOROUSLY EXPRESSED BY GEORGE BERNARD SHAW: "THOSE WHO CAN--DO. THOSE WHO CANNOT--TEACH." SHAW'S HUMOR SURVIVES, BUT WE SHOULD REMEMBER THAT HIS PERSPECTIVE WAS 19TH CENTURY VICTORIAN. TODAY'S CLASSROOM IS NO PLACE FOR THE TIMID AND THE FAINTHEARTED TO HIDE FROM LIFE . . . TEACHING TODAY, IS FOR THOSE WHO CAN <u>DO.</u>

LET ME BRIEFLY BROADEN THE SCOPE OF MY REMARKS SO THAT MERIT PAY CAN BE VIEWED IN WHAT I CONSIDER THE PROPER PERSPECTIVE. TEACHER EVALUATION AND SALARY ARE THE ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS OF MERIT PAY, BUT THEY CANNOT BE ISOLATED FROM THE MANY RELATED ISSUES THAT ARE PART OF TEACHER PROFESSIONALISM.

1. <u>TEACHER PREPARATION AND ENTRY INTO THE PROFESSION</u> - ANY DISCUSSION OF THE QUALITY OF AMERICA'S TEACHERS BEGINS WITH THE COLLEGE PREPARATION OF TEACHER CANDIDATES. I HAVE LONG-FAVORED ELIMINATION OF AN UNDERGRADUATE EDUCATION MAJOR AS RECOMMENDED BY THE CARNEGIE FORUM AND THE HOLMES GROUP. A STRONG, SOLID ACADEMIC FOUNDATION IS ESSENTIAL FOR TEACHERS. I AM NOT CONVINCED, HOWEVER, THAT THE WAY TO IMPROVE TEACHER PREPARATION IS TO REQUIRE FIVE RATHER THAN FOUR YEARS--MORE IS NOT NECESSARILY BETTER. I THINK THE <u>QUALITY</u> OF ACADEMIC PREPARATION CAN BE GREATLY IMPROVED WITHOUT ADDITIONAL TIME AND COST.

   THE PEDAGOGICAL TRAINING NEEDED CAN BE PROVIDED IN FEWER, MORE RIGOROUS EDUCATION COURSES AND--MOST IMPORTANT--THROUGH STRUCTURED INTERNSHIP PROGRAMS WITH EXPERIENCED PRACTITIONERS. THE WIDESPREAD INTEREST IN PROGRAMS SUCH AS MASTER TEACHER, MENTOR TEACHER, COLLEAGUE TEACHER, AND THE LIKE, ALL ASSUME THE DIFFERENTIATION AMONG TEACHERS THAT IS FEARED BY CRITICS OF MERIT PAY . . . . THEY ALSO ASSUME AN ACTIVE PROFESSIONAL LEADERSHIP ROLE BY TEACHERS THEMSELVES. OUTSTANDING EXPERIENCED TEACHERS SHOULD HAVE

A MAJOR RESPONSIBILITY FOR INDUCTING NEW TEACHERS INTO THE PROFESSION. THEY, MORE THAN UNIVERSITY PROFESSORS, CAN DEVELOP THE PEDAGOGICAL SKILLS AND INFLUENCE THE PERFORMANCE OF THEIR INEXPERIENCED COLLEAGUES. IF WE CAN IDENTIFY THE TALENTED TEACHERS WHO SHOULD PERFORM THIS ROLE, THEN WE CAN IDENTIFY THE TALENTED TEACHERS WHO DESERVE SOME TYPE OF MERITORIOUS PAY.

NATIONAL TEACHER EXAMS AND, IN VIRGINIA, THE BEGINNING TEACHER ASSISTANCE PROGRAM, ARE WORTHWHILE EFFORTS TO IMPOSE STANDARDS BY ENSURING THAT THOSE COMING INTO THE PROFESSION CAN DEMONSTRATE AT LEAST A MINIMAL LEVEL OF COMPETENCY. THEY WILL NOT, HOWEVER, DISCRIMINATE BETWEEN AVERAGE TEACHERS AND THE BEST TEACHERS--AND THAT IS WHAT LOCAL SCHOOL DISTRICTS MUST DO IF THEY WISH TO IMPLEMENT A MERIT PAY PLAN. IT IS ALWAYS MORE DIFFICULT TO DISTINGUISH BETWEEN AN "A" STUDENT AND A "B" STUDENT, BUT WE EXPECT TEACHERS TO DO IT ALL THE TIME.

2. <u>TEACHER SALARIES</u> - IF TEACHING IS TO BE COMPETITIVE WITH OTHER PROFESSIONS IN ATTRACTING HIGHLY-QUALIFIED PEOPLE, IT MUST OFFER COMPETITIVE SALARIES AND PROMOTION OPPORTUNITIES--PROMOTION <u>WITHIN</u> THE TEACHING PROFESSION, NOT PROMOTION <u>OUT</u> OF THE CLASSROOM. ALL THE RHETORIC ABOUT ATTRACTING "THE BEST AND THE BRIGHTEST" IS MEANINGLESS UNLESS WE GREATLY INCREASE BOTH THE CHALLENGES AND THE REWARDS OF TEACHING--INCLUDING THE MONETARY REWARDS THAT OUR SOCIETY ASSOCIATES WITH PRESTIGIOUS

PROFESSIONS. WE HAVE DEPENDED FOR TOO LONG ON THE INTRINSIC REWARDS TO HOLD GOOD TEACHERS WHOSE INCOME WAS SUPPLEMENTED BY A SECOND SALARY--EITHER FROM A SPOUSE OR A PART-TIME JOB. BETTER SALARIES FOR ALL TEACHERS MUST PRECEDE MERIT PAY FOR SELECTED TEACHERS.

MERIT PAY PLANS ARE DOOMED WHEN THEY ARE INTENDED TO SUBSTITUTE FOR GENERAL SALARY IMPROVEMENTS. LIMITED AMOUNTS OF MONEY DIVIDED AMONG A LIMITED NUMBER OF TEACHERS LEAVES EVERYONE DISSATISFIED AND GAINS NOTHING EDUCATIONALLY. THE DISTRIBUTION OF SUBSTANTIAL AMOUNTS TO A PREDETERMINED NUMBER OF TEACHERS--A QUOTA--IS INEVITABLY ARBITRARY AND DEVISIVE. I WOULD RATHER EXPLAIN TO A TEACHER THAT A MERIT RAISE WAS DENIED ON THE BASIS OF A PROFESSIONAL EVALUATION THAN ON THE BASIS OF A NUMERICAL CUTOFF POINT.

3. TEACHER EVALUATION - ULTIMATELY, A SUCCESSFUL MERIT PAY PLAN DEPENDS UPON A SUCCESSFUL EVALUATION SYSTEM--ONE THAT REFLECTS THE RESEARCH ON EFFECTIVE TEACHING, INVOLVES TEACHERS IN THE DESIGN AND IMPLEMENTATION, AND ENSURES THE EXPERTISE OF EVALUATORS. IN FAIRFAX, TEACHERS--INCLUDING REPRESENTATIVES OF THE TEACHER ASSOCIATIONS--ARE INVOLVED IN DESIGNING, TESTING, AND MODIFYING THE EVALUATION INSTRUMENT; ARE TRAINED TO SERVE ON OBSERVATION TEAMS AS PEER EVALUATORS; AND CONSTITUTE A MAJORITY OF AN APPEALS BOARD WHICH REVIEWS CAREER LEVEL II EVALUATIONS. CAREER LEVEL II IS OUR VOLUNTARY MERIT PAY LEVEL FOR TEACHERS

WITH AT LEAST SIX YEARS OF EXPERIENCE WHO ARE RATED AS SKILLFUL OR EXEMPLARY ON CAREER LEVEL I. THOSE WHO ACHIEVE CAREER LEVEL II WILL RECEIVE SIGNIFICANT INCREASES IN SALARY, BE REEVALUATED PERIODICALLY, ASSUME LEADERSHIP ROLES AMONG THEIR COLLEAGUES, AND REMAIN CLASSROOM TEACHERS.

THIS KIND OF AN APPROACH TO MERIT PAY ACHIEVES THREE IMPORTANT GOALS:

1. IT REWARDS OUTSTANDING TEACHERS WITH BOTH SALARY AND PRESTIGE.
2. IT STRENGTHENS THE TEACHING PROFESSION BY CULTIVATING LEADERSHIP FROM WITHIN AND PROVIDING COLLEGIAL SUPPORT.
3. IT MAKES IT PROFESSIONALLY AND FINANCIALLY ADVANTAGEOUS FOR THE BEST TEACHERS TO REMAIN IN THE CLASSROOM AND TO THEREBY IMPROVE THE QUALITY OF EDUCATION FOR STUDENTS--WHICH IS THE BOTTOM LINE.